

ON THE HORIZON

SCRAMBLED EGGHEADS ON THE RIGHT

Mr. Buckley's New Weekly

DWIGHT MACDONALD

LAST fall a self-confident young man named William F. Buckley, Jr., announced that he had raised \$290,000 from 125 "investors" to publish "a new conservative weekly of opinion." He said he had put in only \$10,000 himself, but had majority control. On November 19, 1955, the first issue of *National Review* appeared without causing undue public agitation. Nor have the ten following issues I have seen set any rivers aflame.

However, *NR* seems worth examining as a cultural phenomenon: the McCarthy nationalists—they call themselves conservatives, but that is surely a misnomer—have never before made so heroic an effort to be intellectually articulate. Here are the ideas, here is the style of the *lumpen-bourgeoisie*, the half-educated, half-successful provincials (and a provincial may live within a mile of the Empire State Building as well as in Kokomo or Sauk Center) who responded to Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and Senator

THE National Review, the newest American weekly of countrywide circulation, represents another attempt of the "doctrinaire" right to find a local habitation and a name. DWIGHT MACDONALD, who has had his own wide experience of political journalism both as writer and editor, here takes a close look at *NR*'s first ten issues. Born in New York City and educated at Yale, Mr. Macdonald founded and edited *Politics*, and he has also been an editor of *Fortune* and *Partisan Review*. He is the author of *Henry Wallace: The Man and the Myth* (Vanguard, 1948) and *The Ford Foundation*, which is scheduled for publication by Reynal early this spring. Currently Mr. Macdonald is a staff writer for the *New Yorker*.

McCarthy. Anxious, embittered, resentful, they feel that the main stream of American politics since 1932 has passed them by, as indeed it has, and they have the slightly paranoid suspiciousness of an isolated minority group. For these are men from underground, the intellectually underprivileged who feel themselves excluded from a world they believe is ruled by liberals (or eggheads—the terms are, significantly, interchangeable in *NR*) just as the economic underdog feels alienated from society.

It is interesting to note that, of the score of "names" who sent in greetings to the first issue, the only ones that can be called intellectuals, by the most generous standards, are Ludwig von Mises and Raymond Moley. The others are a weird mixture: Admiral Ben Moreel and Adolphe Menjou; Gene Tunney and J. Howard Pew, the Pennsylvania oil magnate; Mrs. Preston Davie, of "Only x Days to Save the Republic" fame, and Father James M. Gillis, C.S.P.; René A. Wormser, counsel to the Reece Committee in its crackpot "investigation" of foundations, and Vivien Kellems, the Joan of Arc of our own Poujadist tax-resistance movement; the aged Edward F. Hutton of Wall Street and the venerable Cecil B. DeMille of Hollywood.

THE young publisher who is launching his review with these variegated blessings comes of a large, rich, and ardently Catholic family whose seignory is an estate in the grand style near Lakeville, Connecticut, which among the more eggheaded local gentry enjoys somewhat the aura of Count Dracula's castle. (Buckley himself has a lit-

the place of half a dozen acres and fifteen or twenty rooms on the Sound near Stamford.) He has nine brothers and two sisters, give or take a couple, all reputed to be of his political views, as are his parents. Buckley, Senior, is a wealthy entrepreneur with "large interests" in oil and other lucrative things (I suspect he put a lot more than \$10,000 into NR). Since he graduated from Yale in 1950, Buckley has done a great deal of speaking and debating, with and without the aid of TV and radio, and has published two books, each of them briefly on the *Times* best-seller list: *God and Man at Yale* (1951), a jaunty indictment of his alma mater as a hotbed of irreligion and socialism; and, with his brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell, *McCarthy and his Enemies* (1954), a laborious piece of special pleading which—to quote myself—gives the effect of a brief by Cadwallader, Wickersham & Taft on behalf of a pick-pocket caught in the men's room of the subway. Buckley is a debater—his mind is quick, clear, plausible, and shallow—and he would rather argue than eat, a trait I find endearing. Had he been born a generation earlier, he would have been making the cafeterias of 14th Street ring with Marxian dialectics. He is a lively and engaging fellow, and would be an excellent journalist if he had a little more humor, common sense, and intellectual curiosity; also if he knew how to write. The tongue is his instrument of expression, not the typewriter.

This is unfortunate since Buckley is NR's editor-in-chief as well as its publisher. There are five other editors: James Burnham, a spectacular backslider from Trotskyism who signaled his departure from the movement in 1940 by publishing *The Managerial Revolution* and whose intellectual horizon has steadily narrowed to a kind of anti-Communism as sterile and doctrinaire as the ideology he fights; Willmoore Kendall, a wild Yale don of extreme, eccentric, and very abstract views who can get a discussion into the shouting stage faster than anybody I have ever known; Jonathan Mitchell, who I think used to write a dullish column for one of the liberal weeklies long ago, and writes another one now for NR; Suzanne LaFollette, whose boiling point is even lower than Kendall's, and who was an associate of Albert Jay Nock on the *Freeman* of the 20's, was later active

on the Trotsky Defense Committee, and was recently associated with John Chamberlain in editing another *Freeman* (a pseudo-conservative job, like NR—Nock's old *Freeman* was the real thing, and an excellent magazine it was); and, finally, William S. Schlamm, who around 1939 did a column in the *New Leader* which denounced the German people as Nazis and Jew-killers in Peglerian accents, and who later became an idea-man for Henry Luce, his chief idea being an abortive attempt to launch a high-brow literary magazine, which came to nothing, after copious expenditure of funds, perhaps because the terms in which he conceived the magazine, as outlined in a notorious memo to Mr. Luce, were vulgar, philistine, chauvinist—in a word, lowbrow. In general, young Mr. Buckley has perhaps not been fortunate in his choice of editors.

The first issue also announced sixteen "Associates and Contributors," of whom I recognize the names of only seven, although I have been around journalistic circles a good many years. Obscurity is no crime—we all have to start somewhere—but, judging from the product, I should guess the obscurity here is deserved. The seven identifiable are Mr. Bozell, John Chamberlain, Max Eastman, Russell Kirk, Eugene Lyons, Morris Ryskind, and Freda Utley. Chamberlain's name was dropped after the first issue and Kirk's after the fourth, perhaps because they preferred to take responsibility only for their own contributions (which have continued). This seems understandable, for Chamberlain is a professional journalist who must take a dim view of much of the magazine, while Kirk's column, "From the Academy," is the only consistently humane and civilized voice in each issue. As a real conservative, with some cultural baggage, he must often wonder what the devil he is doing in this particular galley.

WE HAVE long needed a good conservative magazine. (We have also long needed a good liberal magazine.) This is not it, any more than its predecessor, the LaFollette-Chamberlain *Freeman*—which deployed much the same forces—was. And for the same reasons: because it is neither good nor conservative.

Like Senator McCarthy, whom it admires, the NR is "anti-liberal" (though, like

him, it never bothers to define very clearly what it means by "liberal") but not conservative. Culturally, a conservative is someone like Irving Babbitt or Paul Elmer More, not always the liveliest company in the world but a respector and defender of tradition. The NR's editorials—as I shall presently show—are as elegant as a poke in the nose, as cultivated as a camp meeting, as witty as a prat-fall. ("After You, Gaston!" for instance, is definitely not a witty head for an editorial in 1956, whatever it may have been in 1916.) Politically, a conservative is someone like that admirable Republican, the late John Marshall Harlan, the "great dissenter" on the post-Civil War Supreme Court, whose respect for the Constitution was such that he insisted on interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment according to the clear intent of the Congress that passed it, as protecting persons (the newly freed slaves) rather than corporations from molestation by state laws; and such that, in his famous *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) dissent, he gave the classic formulation to the doctrine that racial segregation in itself is discriminatory (because, although he himself was a pro-slavery man until after the Civil War and was never any special "friend of the Negro," in his old-fashioned simplicity he thought that *Plessy*, a Negro, had indeed been deprived of his rights under the Fourteenth Amendment when he was arrested for refusing to move from a "white" to a "colored" railway coach). In short, a true conservative, like a true liberal, sticks to his principles even when the result goes against his prejudices.

Not of such stuff are Buckley and his colleagues made. Indeed, they object to the Supreme Court's recent recognition, after half a century of shameful equivocation, of Harlan's *Plessy* doctrine. They don't meet the central issue, they don't quite dare to state that segregation is not in itself discrimination, because they generally don't meet awkward issues head-on (or perhaps just don't recognize them—one must allow for a general obtuseness), but they sneak in the back way with a pious declaration that segregation "is a problem that should be solved not by the central government, but locally—in the states—and in the hearts of men."

A true conservative appeals to the laws or, if desperate, to tradition, but certainly not to

the "hearts of men." This is demagoguery, or rather, since the NR is not very persuasive, attempted demagoguery.

Again, an article in the NR objects to the Supreme Court's reversing Judge Medina's sentencing of Harry Sacher for contempt of court after the 1949 trial of the top Communist leaders, and also to the criticisms of Medina's judicial conduct which some of the justices made. The writer gives no reasons for objecting to the reversal and does not try to show that Medina's conduct was correct. He merely quotes from the Supreme Court's decision as if it were *ipso facto* scandalous—as, of course, it is to the hopped-up readers of NR—and then concludes: "The lesson which Communist lawyers will draw from the Supreme Court's decision—is: go and do likewise." Very likely, but hardly a conservative approach; bending the law to serve a Worthy Cause is more in the style of those terrible pragmatic Deweyan liberals. So, too, with the invasion of private rights by the state. Conservatives are concerned about this, and so is NR—except that NR's concern is selective: it is sensitive about property rights but less so about civil liberties, unless someone it takes to be on its own side is involved, as in the firing of Professor Fuchs from George Washington University after he had been a cooperative witness (about his Communist past) before a Congressional committee. Mr. Bozell wrote a fine muckraking exposé about *that* scandal, but when liberal oxen are similarly gored, NR files the case under Saving the Republic. That the liberals have often behaved in the same way is interesting and, if one tends as I do to sympathize more with them than with the NR attitude, distressing, but really beside the point. To be simply anti-liberal is not to be a conservative—nor, of course, vice versa. It is to be, simply, anti-liberal—i.e., the opposite number of the liberals, and opposite numbers have a way of adding up to the same sum in the end. The true conservative, like the true liberal, is not simply anti-something; he is for a set of principles, and this is a much more painful business than just sticking with the gang.

JOURNALISTICALLY, the *National Review* actually manages to be duller than the liberal weeklies. It is even more predictable, much more long-winded, and a good deal

less competent. Considering that its editors are by no means journalistic neophytes, it is a remarkably amateurish job. (I use the term in the bad sense: trying to do the same thing as the pros, but with inferior technique, as in amateur theatricals. There is also a good sense: trying to do something different from the pros, using a technique that is "unprofessional" only in that it is original, as in D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*.) Their idea of a hot series is four articles on "Presidential Inability" in which the Constitutional problems posed by Eisenhower's recent illness are explored with a grim thoroughness that includes the facsimile reproduction of two Congressional bills and one resolution. The cartoons are sometimes vapid (a seance of diplomats, with Stalin's specter hovering overhead; caption: "Spirit of Geneva, Are You There?"), sometimes primitive (Truman as a parrot on a perch saying "KWAK YAK YAK KWAK KWAK"), sometimes rather touchingly antique (a mousy, bespectacled figure leaps in the air as his backside is peppered with birdshot, his briefcase labeled, so help me, "John Q."), but always bad-amateurish. And the *longueurs*! I'm no devotee of the brief article, as reader or as writer, and one of the reasons for the dullness of the liberal weeklies has long seemed to me their habit of cutting every article down to a couple of thousand words; four 1,500 word articles can read much more monotonously than one definitive job of 6,000. But an article can be long because the writer has a lot to say, or because he doesn't know how to say it. Almost everything seems long in the NR, even the short pieces.

Especially painful are the "light" efforts, like Mr. Schlamm's doggedly jocose "Arts and Manners" column ("My idea of a perfect evening has always been to listen to an old performance of *Don Giovanni*, my eyes closed so that they can see the perfection of the dear girl next to me"), or Morrie Ryskind's interminable "They'll Never Get Me on That Couch," a heavy-breathing onslaught on psychoanalysis which concludes: "Me—I've had enough. I've already served the trauma with eviction papers and I am sending him to military school. I'm making another three-year retreat to the w-mb. So long, folks; see you in 1958." The reader is served a number of these soufflés that col-

lapse into soggy facetiousness. So many, in fact, that it seems likely the editors have made a deliberate effort to liven up the magazine, praiseworthy as against the pale earnestness of the liberal magazines—but, alas, it takes more than intention to be amusing.

ANOTHER trait of amateur (bad-style) journalism is to use much space in the violent expression of one's opinions and very little in backing them up, or even defining them. Buckley rhetoricizes for two pages in support of the Eastland Committee's recent investigation of Communist sympathies among employees of the *New York Times*—opening, with customary elegance: "The other day the N.Y. *Times* demonstrated its mastery of the art of kicking a midget in the groin and then staging a parade in honor of itself"—but the only specific charge he makes is that the *Times* has "defended Owen Lattimore," and he gives no evidence to support it. The real question, of course, as in the case of the Hollywood Ten, is whether Communists have had any influence on the contents of the paper, but Buckley shows no interest in this, any more than Senator Eastland did, perhaps because the results would be disappointing. So, too, Willmoore Kendall, who produces a weekly column of abstruse indignation called "The Liberal Line," finds enough space to devote an entire column to reprinting quotations from an editorial in the *Progressive* giving Christmas greetings to various persons for services rendered to the liberal cause. But Professor Kendall—who in his unworldly enthusiasm for abstractions is the very type of "egghead" the rest of the magazine denounces—has never felt he had enough space to explain just what he means by "the liberal line." The closest he has come is in a five-point credo (Kendall is great on points, generally somewhat blunted) which merrily chases its tail:

"1. That there is a Liberal point of view on national and world affairs, for which the word 'Liberal' has been appropriated. [Fair enough.]

"2. That the point of view consists, on the one hand, of a distinctively Liberal way of looking at and grasping political reality, and on the other hand of a distinctively Liberal set of values and goals. [We're right back at Grand Central again.]

"3. That the nation's leading opinion-makers for the most part share the Liberal point of view. . . .

"4. That we may properly speak of them as a huge *propaganda machine*, engaged in a major, sustained assault upon the sanity, and upon the prudence and the morality of the American people. . . .

"5. That *National Review* must keep a watchful eye on . . . the Liberal propaganda machine . . . in a word, on the *Liberal Line*."

In short, there is a Liberal viewpoint that is called Liberal and that expresses Liberal "values and goals." It is a huge *propaganda machine* and must be kept an eye on. If italics were horses, intellectual beggars might ride.

The most curious article yet printed by NR is a seven-page feature called "The Strange Case of Dr. Dooley," which is about a Connecticut psychiatrist who recently pleaded guilty to having had sexual relations with various young boys he had been treating. This might be expected in the *Daily News* or in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, but why in a political weekly? Aside from the fact it all happened near Lakeville, Conn., the Buckley tribe's native habitat (but that explanation seems too amateurish—even for the NR), the only discernible reasons are that Dr. Dooley claimed his pederasty was therapeutic and that his lawyer and certain other people supported this exculpation on the grounds that his methods had "worked," i.e., had improved the psychological health of his young patients. This gives the anonymous author—why no signature, by the way?—a chance for several yards of moralizing about progressive education, sexual morality, pragmatic liberalism, etc. But even granting that Dr. Dooley's supporters were liberals—which, in fact, is likely—it seems a peculiarly indirect method of polemic. Perverse, in fact.

But then everything has a way of being converted to grist for the NR's political line—another bad-amateur trait, and one shared by the *Daily Worker*. A review of a book about the sinking of the *Titanic* turns into a parable about modern society, with the captains "in the chancelleries of London, Paris and Washington . . . smitten by the deadly sickness of mind and will that is called Liberalism," able only to "chatter incoherently on the bridges of their sinking ships." Review-

ing a current play, Mr. Schlamm, who weirdly combines a rather sleazy *bon-vivant* attitude with strait-laced vigilance against liberal sex, writes: "*Janus* is of course about adultery. Nobody would dare to produce a Broadway play that is not." The music critic tells Beethoven that he "may have thought he was expressing the misty complexities of the Rights of Man," but he was "in fact . . . transliterating for his age the spirit of Sophoclean tragedy," one of his roles being "Oedipus alone, his eyes' gore drenching his beard." One of Buckley's brothers writes a feature article warning sportsmen not to ask for Federal subsidies for game reservations because *That Way Lies Statism*. And so it goes. Never a bright moment.

THE "Publisher's Statement" with which the first issue opens may fairly be taken as a sample of the NR prose style, since presumably it was written with special care. Four main qualities emerge, to wit:

Opacity: "*National Review* is out of place . . . because, in its maturity, literate America rejected conservatism in favor of radical social experimentation. Instead of covetously consolidating its premises, the United States seems tormented by its tradition of fixed postulates having to do with the meaning of existence, with the relationship of the state to the individual, of the individual to his neighbor, so clearly enunciated in the enabling documents of our Republic."

Brutality: "Drop a little itching powder in Jimmy Wechsler's bath and before he has scratched himself for the third time, Arthur Schlesinger [Schlesinger *junior* is clearly meant, not his father—but let's not quibble] will have denounced you in a dozen books and speeches."

Banality: "Let's face it," "when all is said and done," "after all, we crashed through," "a vigorous and incorruptible journal of conservative opinion" [they mean them], "we have nothing to offer but the best that is in us." (Compare a later editorial: "Our statesmen must be gluttons for punishment. One wink from a Soviet diplomat and they are ready to rush halfway across the world to get kicked in the teeth." [Twenty-nine words, two clichés, one kick in the teeth.])

Vulgarity: "And that, ladies and gentlemen, leaves us just about the hottest thing in town." On this note, the editor-in-chief con-

cludes his *Apologia*, his *Areopagitica*, his call for a return to tradition. To borrow another snappy NR locution: "Well, brother, what do you think?"

THIS is indeed the voice of the *lumpen-bourgeoisie*. NR's "Letters" department is revealing. There are almost no critical letters, not because the editors have suppressed them—or, at least, so I would guess—but because the magazine's level is not serious enough to stimulate them. Nor are there letters of correction or amplification; readers satisfied by so modestly endowed a journal are unlikely to have much to add. The whole atmosphere is that of the religious revival ("Amen, brother!") rather than of dialogue or communication. These are, essentially, love letters—brief, stammering protestations of affection. The writers are inarticulate, culturally underprivileged folk. The diction is either stiff, like a farmhand's Sunday suit—"Please permit me to wish the promoters every success in this worthwhile project"—or vulgar—"thanks for a home base." In both cases it is the language of people not accustomed to expressing themselves on paper. "I am crazy about it," a housewife writes from San Francisco. "Your wonderful weekly really fills a gap." A Lt. Col. pronounces it "a fine periodical," while a lady writes from Miami, "Your new magazine is magnificent. Every single word of the first three editions has been devoured by me." Another lady of Dallas confesses "... so satisfying. I myself find nothing to criticize." And a clergyman weighs in all the way from Huntsville, Utah: "Even for a first issue, it's a superlative job—honest, jam-packed factually, witty ... something we have been waiting and praying for in America."

There is frequently a sort of pathos in this enthusiasm, like the joy of a long-beleaguered garrison when the U.S. Marines finally arrive: "... an oasis in the desert. The spring has been very dry since 1932. This is a second Valley Forge." "At last the faceless, voiceless, unorganized but patriotic genuine Americans ... have a medium." "God knows it is high time." "... the long-needed house organ of the outnumbered but still dynamic American Underground that refuses to bend with the prevailing winds of Regimentation, Monopoly, Conformity, and Ideological Sleepwalking."

This mood of helpless isolation is also present in the magazine itself. There are so many enemies; the liberal conspiracy is omnipresent; it includes not only Mrs. Roosevelt, Dean Acheson, and Paul Hoffman, but also *Life*, the *New York Times*, nay even Eisenhower himself, whose behavior is as constantly disappointing to the editors as that of F.D.R. was to the editors of the liberal weeklies in the 30's. Defectors are constantly cropping up, as David Lawrence (because of his "strange proposal" that both parties nominate Eisenhower in 1956), or the late Bernard DeVoto, whose obituary posed the usual problem for John Chamberlain: how could the man who had so valiantly battled for the philistines against Van Wyck Brook's egghead attack on Mark Twain in the 20's ("The stuff about Mark Twain being a displaced Russian novelist was strictly for the birds"), how could he have later fallen for all that liberal propaganda? (Bad company, concludes Mr. Chamberlain; Benny shouldn't have hung around the *Harper's* poolroom.)

In the dull lexicon of NR there is no such word as success. McCarthy was their one triumph, and where are the headlines of yesteryear? One of Buckley's sisters circulated a denunciation, among her fellow Smith alumnae, of certain professors as being tainted with Communism; the result was, as she reveals in an article in the first issue bitterly entitled "How to Raise Money in the Ivy League," that "in less than three months, the world's largest women's college received more money [from its alumnae] than had ever been collected in any full year in its history." Buckley himself was equally effective at Yale; the Alumni Fund received record contributions in the year after his *God and Man at Yale* appeared.

The most depressing article I found in NR—and that's saying a lot—was a lugubrious think-piece titled "The Atomic Disarmament Trap," which the editors summarized: "Our foreign policy, says an expert on atomic politics, is based on the premise that the USSR will continue to reject international control of atomic energy. But Moscow may disarm us by accepting—and keeping faith." The danger is clear, appalling, and up to now not noticed by anybody but NR: since we have more atom-hydrogen bombs than they do, we would be giving up a military

advantage in exchange merely for avoiding the possible destruction of the world, including U.S., or us. It's no picnic, being an editor of NR—or even a reader.

PERHAPS the most significant editorial NR has printed is "A Bow to the Left" in the January 18 issue, in which the editors confess a certain admiration for Paul Hoffman, Elmo Roper, and the other directors of the Fund for the Republic. "The point is that none of the directors has very much to gain, and all of them have considerable to lose, in the eyes of a public soberer than they, by their bizarre activities. But on they go. They are quite obviously prepared to lose not only a measure of personal esteem, but also, if necessary, tax exemption! . . . We think, by contrast, of the scores upon scores of timorous right-wingers we happen to know who will overwhelm you with dire talk about the engulfing age of socialism . . . and yet when the occasion presents itself to make a sacrifice in behalf of their convictions, the conversation quickly turns to the weather. . . . That is what sets them off from the directors of the Fund for the Republic. And that is why the Left marches on, while the Right retreats." The editors don't try to explain this difference in left and right behavior. I suggest it is because the left—to use NR's quaint terminology—has a set of ideas and ideals in which they can believe, which seem to them intellectually consistent

and morally attractive, while the right does not. (For myself, I no longer find the left ideology either morally or intellectually satisfying, but that is another question; the point is that it is a far more plausible doctrine than the right's crude patchwork of special interests.) One of NR's few literate letters-to-the-editor, from Frank S. Meyer of Woodstock, N.Y., comments on "the insistence [of other readers] that the magazine publish nothing that makes serious intellectual demands upon the reader," and continues: "But we are an opposition, and we have to fight conformity. . . . It is ideas they [the dominant liberal "social engineers"] fear, for in the end it is ideas which are decisive. It was ideas developed in the *Nation* and the *New Republic* and the *Masses* thirty and forty years ago that seduced a generation and laid the foundations for the New Deal and what has followed. The circulations of these magazines were not large, but they spoke to the younger generation, in and out of the universities, and won them—with devastating effect." Ideas, however, or even sufficient journalistic skill to conceal their lack, are just what NR lacks. A more typical reader is a gentleman of Memphis, who writes: "I think you are going places. I have only one comment of criticism. Your writers are really too brilliant for the lay mind, if you know what I mean." I know what he means, and it isn't encouraging for the future of the *National Review*.